

Decolonizing Nutrition Science

Craig Hassel, Ph.D., Asha L. Tamang, Ph.D.

Department of Food Science & Nutrition, University of Minnesota,



Abstract

Despite keen interest and strong commitment among indigenous communities to address food sovereignty and diet-related health inequities, very few indigenous scholars choose nutrition sciences and/or dietetics professions. Why? Implicit structural and cultural barriers can discourage indigenous scholar participation. Results suggest 'hidden subjectivities' permeating these disciplines contribute to "blind spots" where food and health relationships emphasizing indigenous value outlooks such as harmony and participation with nature go under-developed and overlooked.

Introduction

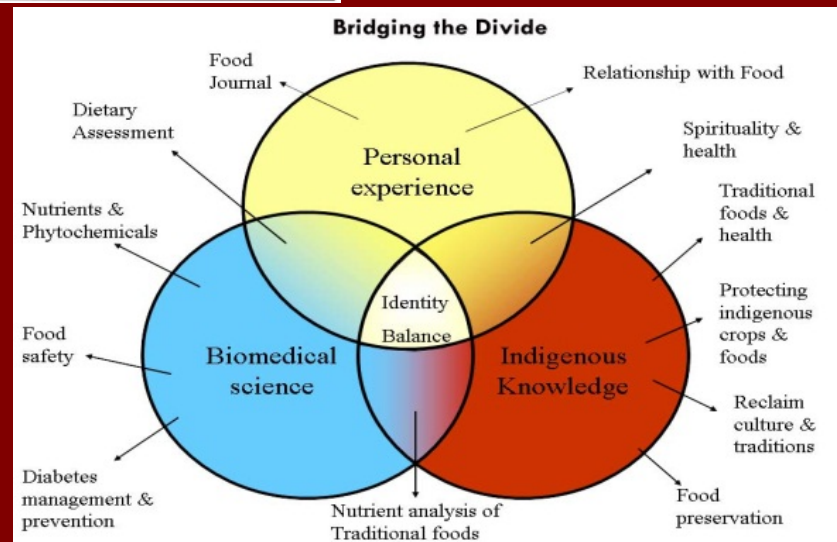
Every human society has developed its own understandings of food and health. Nutrition science and dietetics disciplines tend to approach food and health issues through material and physiochemical dimensions. Food as nutrients. Food as fuel. Food as bioactive molecules. Food as a commodity. Food as an object for human manipulation.

Many Indigenous knowledge systems allow for physiochemical differences but also emphasize relational dimensions of food and health that are often overlooked by nutrition science. Food as nurturance. Food as participation in the world. Food as memory. Food as consciousness. Food as meaning. Food as connection. Food as personal experience.

Methodology

Cross-cultural engagement (CCE) represents a craft of empathically engaging the food and health understandings of non-European cultures. This critically reflective approach emerged through developing trusting, respectful, long-term relationships with indigenous peoples. It includes opening oneself to cognitive frameshifting, a practice of temporarily stepping outside of one's habitual, professionalized thought patterns and into an indigenous framework of background assumptions. This shift in cognitive ground creates a different perceptual location, or standpoint from which to reconsider disciplinary thought styles. CCE practice allows implicit, often subconscious cultural assumptions "hidden in plain sight" to become more visible and explicit.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 cup 164g (164 g)	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 166	Calories from Fat 5
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 1g	1%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 5mg	0%
Total Carbohydrate 35g	12%
Dietary Fiber 3g	12%
Sugars 1g	
Protein 7g	
Vitamin A 0%	Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 0%	Iron 5%
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.	
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Results

The practice of CCE helps to explicate cultural values that are often implicit, yet permeate scientific practice. For example, **human control over nature** and **human ascendancy over other life forms** are often emphasized to the extent they subjugate respect for nature and considerations of social and epistemic justice. Nutrition science relies heavily on **de-contextualized strategies** that emphasize underlying material structure while dissociating phenomena from cultural context.

For example, reliance upon "**mechanisms of action**" projects the idea of a mechanistic universe inherited from physics and chemistry as applied to physiology and then nutrition. As mechanistic thought becomes integral to the mental models and habits of mind through which disciplinary inquiry proceeds it becomes hidden through wide acceptance and so escapes skeptical inquiry and critique.

Indigenous cultures often invoke fundamentally different systems of thought in approaching food and health issues. Indigenous knowledges provide understandings emphasizing holistic health and interdependence of earth, water, plants, animals. These dimensions of food and health are often overlooked and under-examined by nutrition science and dietetics disciplines.

Implications

While biomedical approaches to nutrition are invaluable, they are limited by constraining theories to serve certain human value outlooks over others. As a practice, CCE holds promise for: 1) Extending skeptical inquiry into implicit disciplinary tenets seldom given over to critical consideration; and 2) Broadening scholarly inquiry through deliberate attempts to cross cognitive boundaries and empathically inhabit different cognitive worlds. CCE holds potential to both deepen and broaden disciplinary inquiry.